



Domestic Abuse During Pregnancy

Domestic abuse, also called domestic violence or intimate partner violence, occurs when a family member tries to control the behavior of another person in the family by inflicting *physical* or *emotional* pain. Unfortunately, domestic abuse can begin with or escalate during a pregnancy. Sometimes it is hard to accept that you are in an abusive relationship.

If any of the following are happening to you, your relationship is abusive:

- 1 You, your children, or your pets are being threatened with physical harm.
- 2 You, your children, or your pets are being slapped, kicked, shoved, hit etc.
- 3 You are being belittled in public.
- 4 Your favorite things are being destroyed in order to hurt you.
- 5 You are not allowed to visit with family or friends of your choosing.
- 6 You are being blamed for the abuse you are receiving.
- 7 You have been or are being forced to have sexual intercourse.

What can you do if your relationship is abusive?

First you must accept the reality that the abuse is not your fault. You are not causing the abuse. Abusive partners have complicated social and psychological issues that you cannot fix. Professionals recognize the abuser's negative pattern of abuse followed by apology with gifts and promises to stop. This pattern repeats over and over again. It does not stop.

Abused pregnant women are at risk for miscarriage, stillbirth, poor maternal weight gain, low birth weight for the baby, and preterm birth. Make it your first responsibility to protect yourself, your unborn child, your children, and if possible, your pets.

It is not easy to leave any relationship including an abusive one. Begin by making a plan. There is a national toll-free number that will connect you with assistance in your state. The national number is 1-800-799-SAFE (7233). In Tennessee, the number is 1-800-289-9018. Speak openly about your situation with the counselors. Ask for their advice.

Next, make copies of important papers such as bank accounts, birth certificates, social security cards, marriage or divorce papers etc. and store them outside your home. Make copies of keys to your home and car. Store these also. You will need clothing for yourself and your children. You will need some cash. Find a trusted friend or family member where you and the children can go for awhile. If there is no one, contact the local shelter for women. Find someone to take your pets until you are on your feet again. When you are ready, go quickly and quietly. Keep your location secret. Immediately, request an order of protection from local law enforcement.

Domestic violence is a serious public health and law enforcement problem in the United States today. Unfortunately, many women are experiencing what you are going through. Break the silence. Talk to your doctor, your nurse, a police officer, a counselor at a shelter. Get help! Life can be good again but you must act now!

References

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